



## SUCCESS STORY

### Journalistic Initiative Connects the Terai and Hill Regions



Madhesi journalists interview a businesswoman in the hill district of Sankhuwasabha.



Visiting journalists meet with Islamic school teachers in the Terai district of Sunsari.

USAID/NEPAL

*The U.S. Agency for International Development's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) program in Nepal aims to bolster the current peace process, strengthen governance mechanisms, and support positive, nonviolent community engagement in the country's political, social, and economic future. The objectives of the program are to:*

1. *Increase access to information and diversify public debate on issues critical to political transition, and*
2. *Increase local-level engagement and participation in the peace process.*

**August 2008** – Journalists in the Terai region of Nepal are often criticized for failing to keep their stories impartial and for inaccurate reporting on issues that concern the Madhesi people, the predominant ethnic group of the fertile lowland. At times, inflammatory media reports based on stereotypes and generalizations have triggered violence between Madhesis and Pahadis, an ethnic group with ancestral ties to the country's hill regions. And over the past two years, various agitating groups in the Terai have targeted media outlets and journalists.

To moderate the biases in the media that fuel these tensions and to promote mutual understanding, USAID/OTI organized an inter-ethnic exchange program for 10 Madhesi and 10 Pahadi journalists. The journalists together visited sensitive areas in six eastern hill and Terai districts where they explored the political issues and everyday realities that affect their counterparts' communities.

For many of the journalists, the activity marked their first exposure to their colleagues' districts, and all the participants reported positive interactions in the communities they visited. Following the visits, the journalists worked in teams of two (one Madhesi and one Pahadi) to co-author articles on current social issues. The teams produced 60 articles that were published in the region's newspapers, and the visits helped to identify similarities between the Madhesi and Pahadi communities, uncover ongoing problems faced by both groups, promote tolerance, and strengthen relationships between the two regions.

The success of this activity was highlighted in the *Nepali Times*, a weekly English-language newspaper, in a June 27, 2008, article entitled "Uniting Hills and Plains: A Unique Journalists' Exchange Bridges the Gap between Madhesh and Pahad." And according to one Madhesi participant, the activity provided an opportunity for mutual interaction between Pahadi and Madhesi journalists and "allowed us to exchange our views and helped in building a healthy relationship between us."

USAID/OTI seeks to bridge the differences that separate the Pahadi and Madhesi communities by increasing accurate reporting on important issues. These efforts not only promote social harmony but also strengthen the media's ability to play a positive role in the peace process.